

REMARKS/ARGUMENTS

Claims 1-32 are currently pending in this application. Applicants respectfully request reconsideration in light of the following remarks.

The Final Office Action imposed a number of prior-art rejections based upon 35 U.S.C. Sections 102(e) and 103(a). It is noted that independent Claim 1, 18 and 20 each were rejected, under 35 U.S.C. Sections 102(e) and/or 103(a), using Ikeda et al. (USPN 2003/0184339), either alone or in combination with another reference or references. That is, all prior art rejections of the presently presented independent claims were linked to, and relied upon, the Ikeda et al. patent as the only reference or the base/primary reference.

Ikeda et al, however, has a PCT filing date of May 24, 2002. Applicants now respectfully submit that the rejections of Claims 1, 18 and 20 using this reference appear to be without merit, since the Ikeda et al. relevant priority date of May 24, 2002 is less than one year before the Applicants' November 3, 2003 filing date of the current application and since Applicants invented the current invention before that priority date.

Applicants submit herewith a Declaration under 37 C.F.R. 1.131, establishing that the invention by Applicants of the presently claimed patent application occurred before the relevant priority date of the Ikeda et al. patent. Accordingly, the Ikeda et al. reference does not appear to qualify as prior art under 35 U.S.C. 102(e), since it is not a patent granted on an application for patent by another filed in the United States before the invention by the Applicants for patent.

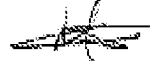
With respect to the dependent claims, Applicants respectfully submit that each of these claims would appear to be patentable not only by virtue of its dependency on the respective base claim, but also for the totality of features recited therein.

In light of the above amendments and remarks, Applicants respectfully submit that Claims 1-32, as currently presented, are in condition for allowance.

Reconsideration and withdrawal of all outstanding rejections is respectfully requested.

The Commissioner is hereby authorized to charge any needed fees to deposit account 50-1600.

Respectfully submitted,



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